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The Last Chronicle of Barset

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

With Illustrations by G. H. Thomas

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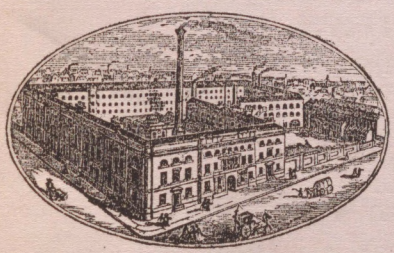

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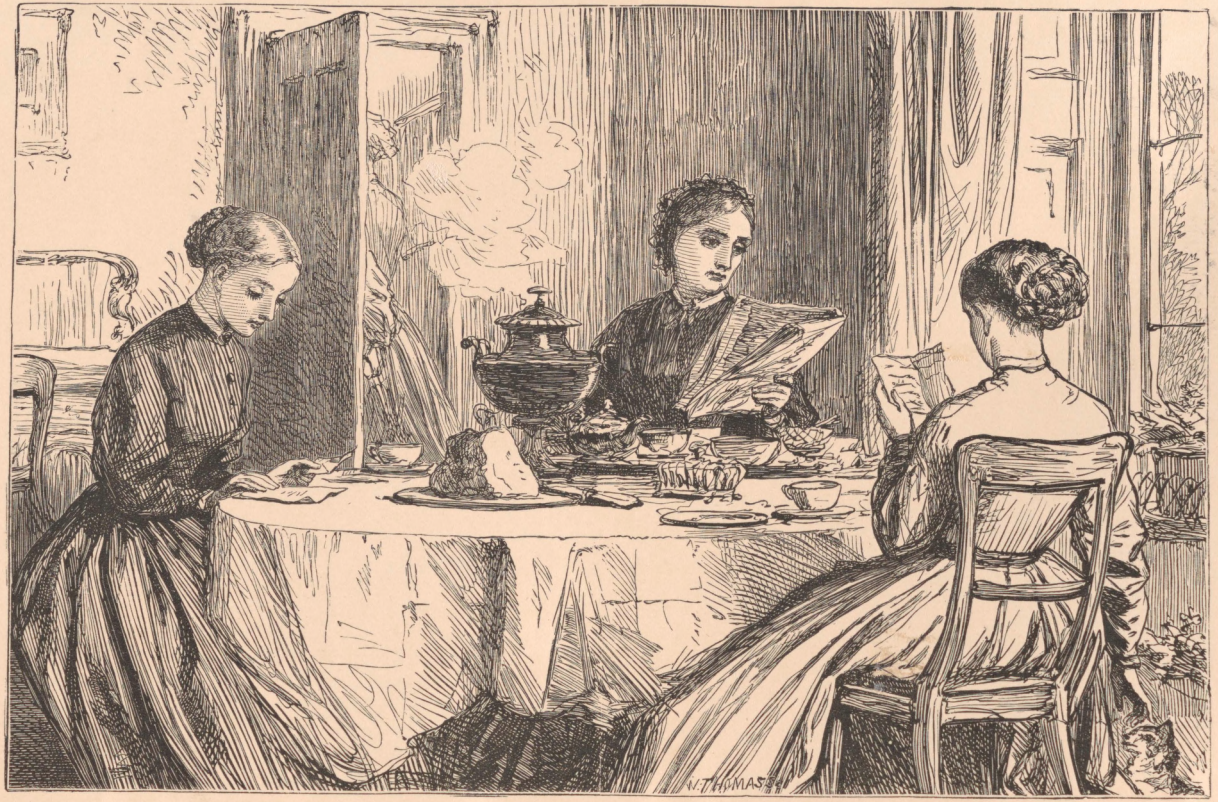

She read the beginning—"Dearest Grace."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GRACE CRAWLEY RETURNS HOME.

ABOUT this time Grace Crawley received two letters, the first of them reaching her while John Eames was still at the cottage, and the other immediately after his return to London. They both help to tell our story, and our reader shall, therefore, read them if he so please,—or, rather, he shall read the first and as much of the second as is necessary for him. Grace's answer to the first letter he shall see also. Her answer to the second will be told in a very few words. The first was from Major Grantly, and the task of answering that was by no means easy to Grace.

"DEAREST GRACE, "Cosby Lodge, — February, 186—.

"I TOLD you when I parted from you, that I should write to you, and I think it best to do so at once, in order that you may fully understand me. Spoken words are soon forgotten,"—"I shall never forget his words," Grace said to herself as she read this;—"and are not always as plain as they might be. Dear Grace, I suppose I ought not to say so, but I fancied when I parted from you at Allington, that I had succeeded in making myself dear to you. I believe you to be so true in spirit, that you were unable to conceal from me the fact that you love me. I shall believe that this is so, till I am deliberately and solemnly assured by yourself that it is not so;—and I conjure you to think what is due both to yourself and to myself, before you allow yourself to think of making such an assurance unless it be strictly true.

"I have already told my own friends that I have asked you to be

my wife. I tell you this, in order that you may know how little effect your answer to me has had towards inducing me to give you up. What you said about your father and your family has no weight with me, and ought ultimately to have none with you. This business of your father's is a great misfortune,—so great that, probably, had we not known each other before it happened, it might have prevented our becoming intimate when we chanced to meet. But we had met before it happened, and before it happened I had determined to ask you to be my wife. What should I have to think of myself if I allowed my heart to be altered by such a cause as that?

"I have only further to say that I love you better than any one in the world, and that it is my best hope that you will be my wife. I will not press you till this affair of your father's has been settled; but when that is over I shall look for my reward without reference to its result. Not that I doubt the result if there be anything like justice in England; but that your debt to me, if you owe me any debt, will be altogether irrespective of that. If, as I suppose, you will remain at Allington for some time longer, I shall not see you till after the trial is over. As soon as that is done, I will come to you wherever you are. In the meantime I shall look for an answer to this; and if it be true that you love me, dear, dear Grace, pray have the courage to tell me so.

"Most affectionately your own,

"Henry Grantly."

When the letter was given to Grace across the breakfast-table, both Mrs. Dale and Lily suspected that it came from Major Grantly, but not a word was spoken about it. When Grace with hesitating hand broke the envelope, neither of her friends looked at her. Lily had a letter of her own, and Mrs. Dale opened the newspaper. But still it was impossible not to perceive that her face became red with blushes, and then they knew that the letter must be from Major Grantly. Grace herself could not read it, though her eye ran down over the two pages catching a word here and a word there. She had looked at the name at once, and had seen the manner of his signature. "Most affectionately your own!" What was she to say to him? Twice, thrice, as she sat at the breakfast-table she turned the page of the letter, and at each turning she read the signature. And she read the beginning, "Dearest Grace." More than that she did not really read till she had got the letter away with her into the seclusion of her own room.

Not a word was said about the letter at breakfast. Poor Grace

went on eating or pretending to eat, but could not bring herself to utter a word. Mrs. Dale and Lily spoke of various matters, which were quite indifferent to them; but even with them the conversation was so difficult that Grace felt it to be forced, and was conscious that they were thinking about her and her lover. As soon as she could make an excuse she left the room, and hurrying upstairs took the letter from her pocket and read it in earnest.

"That was from Major Grantly, mamma," said Lily.

"I daresay it was, my dear."

"And what had we better do; or what had we better say?"

"Nothing,—I should say. Let him fight his own battle. If we interfere, we may probably only make her more stubborn in clinging to her old idea."

"I think she will cling to it."

"For a time she will, I daresay. And it will be best that she should. He himself will respect her for it afterwards." Thus it was agreed between them that they should say nothing to Grace about the letter unless Grace should first speak to them.

Grace read her letter over and over again. It was the first love-letter she had ever had;—the first letter she had ever received from any man except her father and brother,—the first, almost, that had ever been written to her by any other than her own old special friends. The words of it were very strange to her ear. He had told her when he left her that he would write to her, and therefore she had looked forward to the event which had now come; but she had thought that it would be much more distant,—and she had tried to make herself believe that when it did come it would be very different from this letter which she now possessed. "He will tell me that he has altered his mind. He ought to do so. It is not proper that he should still think of me when we are in such disgrace." But now the letter had come, and she acknowledged the truth of his saying that written words were clearer in their expression than those simply spoken. "Not that I could ever forget a syllable that he said." Yet, as she held the letter in her hand she felt that it was a possession. It was a thing at which she could look in coming years, when he and she might be far apart,—a thing at which she could look with pride in remembering that he had thought her worthy of it.

Neither on that day nor on the next did she think of her answer, nor on the third or the fourth with any steady thinking. She knew that an answer would have to be written, and she felt that the sooner it was written the easier might be the writing; but she felt

also that it should not be written too quickly. A week should first elapse, she thought, and therefore a week was allowed to elapse, and then the day for writing her answer came. She had spoken no word about it either to Mrs. Dale or to Lily. She had longed to do so, but had feared. Even though she should speak to Lily she could not be led by Lily's advice. Her letter, whatever it might be, must be her own letter. She would admit of no dictation. She must say her own say, let her say it ever so badly. As to the manner of saying it, Lily's aid would have been invaluable; but she feared that she could not secure that aid without compromising her own power of action,—her own individuality; and therefore she said no word about the letter either to Lily or to Lily's mother.

On a certain morning she fixed herself at her desk to write her letter. She had known that the task would be difficult, but she had little known how difficult it would be. On that day of her first attempt she did not get it written at all. How was she to begin? He had called her "Dearest Grace;" and this mode of beginning seemed as easy as it was sweet. "It is very easy for a gentleman," she said to herself, "because he may say just what he pleases." She wrote the words, "Dearest Henry," on a scrap of paper, and immediately tore it into fragments as though she were ashamed of having written them. She knew that she would not dare to send away a letter beginning with such words. She would not even have dared to let such words in her own handwriting remain within the recesses of her own little desk. "Dear Major Grantly," she began at length. It seemed to her to be very ugly, but after much consideration she believed it to be correct. On the second day the letter was written as follows:—

"My dear Major Grantly,— "Allington, Thursday.

"I do not know how I ought to answer your kind letter, but I must tell you that I am very much flattered by your great goodness to me. I cannot understand why you should think so much of me, but I suppose it is because you have felt for all our misfortunes. I will not say anything about what might have happened, if it had not been for papa's sorrow and disgrace; and as far as I can help it, I will not think of it; but I am sure that I ought not to think about loving any one, that is, in the way you mean, while we are in such trouble at home. I should not dare to meet any of your great friends, knowing that I had brought nothing with me but disgrace. And I should feel that I was doing an injury to *dear* Edith, which would be worse to me than anything.

"Pray believe that I am quite in earnest about this. I know that a gentleman ought not to marry any girl to do himself and his family an injury by it; and I know that if I were to make such a marriage I should be unhappy ever afterwards, even though I loved the man ever so dearly, with all my heart." These last words she had underscored at first, but the doing so had been the unconscious expression of her own affection, and had been done with no desire on her part to convey that expression to him. But on reading the words she discovered their latent meaning, and wrote it all again.

"Therefore I know that it will be best that I should wish you good-by, and I do so, thanking you again and again for your goodness to me.

"Believe me to be,

"Yours very sincerely,

"GRACE CRAWLEY."

The letter when it was written was hateful to her; but she had tried her hand at it again and again, and had found that she could do nothing better. There was much in his letter that she had not attempted to answer. He had implored her to tell him whether or no she did in truth love him. Of course she loved him. He knew that well enough. Why should she answer any such question? There was a way of answering it indeed which might serve her turn,—or rather serve his, of which she was thinking more than of her own. She might say that she did not love him. It would be a lie, and he would know that it would be a lie. But still it might serve the turn. She did not like the idea of writing such a lie as that, but nevertheless she considered the matter. It would be very wicked; but still, if it would serve the turn, might it not be well to write it. But at last she reflected that, after all, the doing of the thing was in her own hands. She could refuse to marry this man without burdening her conscience with any lie about it. It only required that she should be firm. She abstained, therefore, from the falsehood, and left her lover's question unanswered. So she put up her letter and directed it, and carried it herself to the village post-office.

On the day after this she got the second letter, and that she showed immediately to Mrs. Dale. It was from her mother, and was written to tell her that her father was seriously ill. "He went up to London to see a lawyer about this weary work of the trial," said Mrs. Crawley. "The fatigue was very great, and on the next day he was so weak that he could not leave his bed. Dr. Turner, who has been very kind, says

that we need not frighten ourselves, but he thinks it must be some time before he can leave the house. He has a low fever on him, and wants nourishment. His mind has wandered once or twice, and he has asked for you, and I think it will be best, love, that you should come home. I know you will not mind it when I say that I think he would like to have you here. Dr. Turner says that the illness is chiefly owing to his not having proper food."

Of course she would go at once. "Dear Mrs. Dale," she said, "I must go home. Can you send me to the station?" Then Mrs. Dale read the letter. Of course they would send her. Would she go on that day, or on the next? Might it not be better to write first, and say that she was going? But Grace would go at once. "I know it will be a comfort to mamma; and I know that he is worse than mamma says." Of course there was no more to be said, and she was despatched to the station. Before she went Mrs. Dale asked after her purse. "If there is any trouble about money,—for your journey, or anything, you will not scruple to come to me as to an old friend." But Grace assured her that there was no trouble about money—for her journey. Then Lily took her aside and produced two clean new five-pound notes. "Grace, dear, you won't be ill-natured. You know I have a little fortune of my own. You know I can give them without missing them." Grace threw herself into her friend's arms and wept, but would have none of her money. "Buy a present from me for your mother,—whom I love though I do not know her." "I will give her your love," Grace said, "but nothing else." And then she went.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOOK COURT.

Mr. Dobbs Broughton and Mr. Musselboro were sitting together on a certain morning at their office in the City, discussing the affairs of their joint business. The City office was a very poor place indeed, in comparison with the fine house which Mr. Dobbs occupied at the West End; but then City offices are poor places, and there are certain City occupations which seem to enjoy the greater credit the poorer are the material circumstances by which they are surrounded. Turning out of a lane which turns out of Lombard Street, there is a desolate, forlorn-looking, dark alley, which is called Hook Court. The entrance to this

alley is beneath the first-floor of one of the houses in the lane, and in passing under this covered way the visitor to the place finds himself in a small paved square court, at the two further corners of which there are two open doors; for in Hook Court there are only two houses. There is No. 1, Hook Court, and No. 2, Hook Court. The entire premises indicated by No 1, are occupied by a firm of wine and spirit merchants, in connexion with whose trade one side and two angles of the court are always lumbered with crates, hampers, and wooden cases. And nearly in the middle of the court, though somewhat more to the wine-merchants' side than to the other, there is always gaping open a trap-door, leading down to vaults below; and over the trap there is a great board with a bright advertisement in very large letters:—

BURTON AND BANGLES.
HIMALAYA WINES,
22s. 6d. per dozen.

And this notice is so bright and so large, and the trap-door is so conspicuous in the court, that no visitor, even to No. 2, ever afterwards can quite divest his memory of those names, Burton and Bangles, Himalaya wines. It may therefore be acknowledged that Burton and Bangles have achieved their object in putting up the notice. The house No. 2, small as it seems to be, standing in the jamb of a corner, is divided among different occupiers, whose names are painted in small letters upon the very dirty posts of the doorway. Nothing can be more remarkable than the contrast between Burton and Bangles and these other City gentlemen in the method taken by them in declaring their presence to visitors in the court. The names of Dobbs Broughton and of A. Musselboro, — the Christian name of Mr. Musselboro was Augustus,—were on one of those dirty posts, not joined together by any visible "and," so as to declare boldly that they were partners; but in close vicinity,—showing at least that the two gentlemen would be found in apartments very near to each other. And on the first-floor of this house Dobbs Broughton and his friend did occupy three rooms, —or rather two rooms and a closet—between them. The larger and front room was tenanted by an old clerk, who sat within a rail in one corner of it. And there was a broad, short counter which jutted out from the wall into the middle of the room, intended for the use of such of the public as might come to transact miscellaneous business with Dobbs Broughton or Augustus Musselboro. But any one accustomed to the look of offices might have seen with half an eye that very little business was ever done on that counter. Behind this large room was a

smaller one, belonging to Dobbs Broughton, in the furnishing and arrangement of which some regard had been paid to comfort. The room was carpeted, and there was a sofa in it, though a very old one, and two arm-chairs and a mahogany office-table, and a cellaret, which was generally well supplied with wine which Dobbs Broughton did not get out of the vaults of his neighbours, Burton and Bangles. Behind this again, but with a separate entrance from the passage, was the closet; and this closet was specially devoted to the use of Mr. Musselboro. Closet as it was,—or cupboard as it might almost have been called,—it contained a table and two chairs; and it had a window of its own, which opened out upon a blank wall which was distant from it not above four feet. As the house to which this wall belonged was four stories high, it would sometimes happen that Mr. Musselboro's cupboard was rather dark. But this mattered the less as in these days Mr. Musselboro seldom used it. Mr. Musselboro, who was very constant at his place of business, — much more constant than his friend, Dobbs Broughton,—was generally to be found in his friend's room. Only on some special occasions, on which it was thought expedient that the commercial world should be made to understand that Mr. Augustus Musselboro had an individual existence of his own, did that gentleman really seat himself in the dark closet. Mr. Dobbs Broughton, had he been asked what was his trade, would have said that he was a stockbroker; and he would have answered truly, for he was a stockbroker. A man may be a stockbroker though he never sells any stock; as he may be a barrister though he has no practice at the bar. I do not say that Mr. Broughton never sold any stock; but the buying and selling of stock for other people was certainly not his chief business. And had Mr. Musselboro been asked what was his trade, he would have probably given an evasive answer. At any rate in the City, and among people who understood City matters, he would not have said that he was a stockbroker. Both Mr. Broughton and Mr. Musselboro bought and sold a good deal, but it was chiefly on account. The shares which were bought and sold very generally did not pass from hand to hand; but the difference in the price of the shares did do so. And then they had another little business between them. They lent money on interest. And in this business there was a third partner, whose name did not appear on the dirty door-post. That third partner was Mrs. Van Siever, the mother of Clara Van Siever whom Mr. Conway Dalrymple intended to portray as Jael driving a nail into Sisera's head.

On a certain morning Mr. Broughton and Mr. Musselboro were sitting together in the office which has been described. They were in

Mr. Broughton's room, and occupied each an arm-chair on the different sides of the fire. Mr. Musselboro was sitting close to the table, on which a ledger was open before him, and he had a pen and ink before him, as though he had been at work. Dobbs Broughton had a small betting-book in his hand, and was seated with his feet up against the side of the fireplace. Both men wore their hats, and the aspect of the room was not the aspect of a place of business. They had been silent for some minutes when Broughton took his cigar-case out of his pocket, and nibbled off the end of a cigar, preparatory to lighting it.

"You had better not smoke here this morning, Dobbs," said Musselboro.

"Why shouldn't I smoke in my own room?"

"Because she'll be here just now."

"What do I care? If you think I'm going to be afraid of Mother Van, you're mistaken. Let come what may, I'm not going to live under her thumb." So he lighted his cigar.

"All right," said Musselboro, and he took up his pen and went to work at his book.

"What is she coming here for this morning?" asked Broughton.

"To look after her money. What should she come for?"

"She gets her interest. I don't suppose there's better paid money in the City."

"She hasn't got what was coming to her at Christmas yet."

"And this is February. What would she have? She had better put her dirty money into the three per cents., if she is frightened at having to wait a week or two."

"Can she have it to-day?"

"What, the whole of it? Of course she can't. You know that as well as I do. She can have four hundred pounds, if she wants it. But seeing all she gets out of the concern, she has no right to press for it in that way. She is the —— old usurer I ever came across in my life."

"Of course she likes her money."

"Likes her money! By George she does; her own and anybody else's that she can get hold of. For a downright leech, recommend me always to a woman. When a woman does go in for it, she is much more thorough than any man." Then Broughton turned over the little pages of his book, and Musselboro pondered over the big pages of his book, and there was silence for a quarter of an hour.

"There's something about nine hundred and fifteen pounds due to her," said Musselboro.

"I daresay there is."

"It would be a very good thing to let her have it if you've got it. The whole of it this morning, I mean."

"If! yes, if!" said Broughton.

"I know there's more than that at the bank."

"And I'm to draw out every shilling that there is! I'll see Mother Van—further first. She can have 500*l.* if she likes it,—and the rest in a fortnight. Or she can have my note-of-hand for it all at fourteen days."

"She won't like that at all," said Musselboro.

"Then she must lump it. I'm not going to bother myself about her. I've pretty nearly as much money in it as she has, and we're in a boat together. If she comes here bothering, you'd better tell her so."

"You'll see her yourself?"

"Not unless she comes within the next ten minutes. I must go down to the court. I said I'd be there by twelve. I've got somebody I want to see."

"I'd stay if I were you."

"Why should I stay for her? If she thinks that I'm going to make myself her clerk, she's mistaken. It may be all very well for you, Mussy, but it won't do for me. I'm not dependent on her, and I don't want to marry her daughter."

"It will simply end in her demanding to have her money back again."

"And how will she get it?" said Dobbs Broughton. "I haven't a doubt in life but she'd take it to-morrow if she could put her hands upon it. And then, after a bit, when she began to find that she didn't like four per cent., she'd bring it back again. But nobody can do business after such a fashion as that. For the last three years she's drawn close upon two thousand a year for less than eighteen thousand pounds. When a woman wants to do that, she can't have her money in her pocket every Monday morning."

"But you've done better than that yourself, Dobbs."

"Of course I have. And who has made the connexion: and who has done the work? I suppose she doesn't think that I'm to have all the sweat and that she is to have all the profit."

"If you talk of work, Dobbs, it is I that have done the most of it." This Mr. Musselboro said in a very serious voice, and with a look of much reproach.

"And you've been paid for what you've done. Come, Mussy, you'd better not turn against me. You'll never get your change out of that. Even if you marry the daughter, that won't give you the

mother's money. She'll stick to every shilling of it till she dies; and she'd take it with her then, if she knew how." Having said this, he got up from his chair, put his little book into his pocket, and walked out of the office. He pushed his way across the court, which was more than ordinarily crowded with the implements of Burton and Bangles' trade, and as he passed under the covered way he encountered at the entrance an old woman getting out of a cab. The old woman was, of course, Mother Van, as her partner, Mr. Dobbs Broughton, irreverently called her. "Mrs. Van Siever, how d'ye do? Let me give you a hand. Fare from South Kensington? I always give the fellows three shillings."

"You don't mean to tell me it's six miles!" And she tendered a florin to the man.

"Can't take that, ma'am," said the cabman.

"Can't take it! But you must take it. Broughton, just get a policeman, will you?" Dobbs Broughton satisfied the driver out of his own pocket, and the cab was driven away. "What did you give him?" said Mrs. Van Siever.

"Just another sixpence. There never is a policeman anywhere about here."

"It'll be out of your own pocket, then," said Mrs. Van. "But you're not going away?"

"I must be at Capel Court by half-past twelve;—I must, indeed. If it wasn't real business, I'd stay."

"I told Musselboro I should be here."

'He's up there, and he knows all about the business just as well as I do. When I found that I couldn't stay for you, I went through the account with him, and it's all settled. Good morning. I'll see you at the West End in a day or two." Then he made his way out into Lombard Street, and Mrs. Van Siever picked her steps across the yard, and mounted the stairs, and made her way into the room in which Mr. Musselboro was sitting.

"Somebody's been smoking, Gus," she said, almost as soon as she had entered the room.

"That's nothing new here," he replied, as he got up from his chair.

"There's no good being done when men sit and smoke over their work. Is it you, or he, or both of you?"

"Well;—it was Broughton was smoking just now. I don't smoke of a morning myself."

"What made him get up and run away when I came?"

"How can I tell, Mrs. Van Siever," said Musselboro, laughing.

"If he did run away when you came, I suppose it was because he didn't want to see you."

"And why shouldn't he want to see me? Gus, I expect the truth from you. How are things going on here?" To this question Mr. Musselboro made no immediate answer; but tilted himself back in his chair and took his hat off, and put his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and looked his patroness full in the face. "Gus," she said again, "I do expect the truth from you. How are things going on here?"

"There'd be a good business,—if he'd only keep things together."

"But he's idle. Isn't he idle?"

"Confoundedly idle," said Musselboro.

"And he drinks;—don't he drink in the day?"

"Like the mischief,—some days. But that isn't the worst of it."

"And what is the worst of it?"

"Newmarket;—that's the rock he's going to pieces on."

"You don't mean to say he takes the money out of the business for that?" And Mrs. Van Siever's face, as she asked the question, expressed almost a tragic horror. "If I thought that I wouldn't give him an hour's mercy."

"When a man bets he doesn't well know what money he uses. I can't say that he takes money that is not his own. Situated as I am, I don't know what is his own and what isn't. If your money was in my name I could keep a hand on it;—but as it is not I can do nothing. I can see that what is put out is put out fairly well; and when I think of it, Mrs. Van Siever, it is quite wonderful that we've lost so little. It has been next to nothing. That has been my doing;—and that's about all that I can do."

"You must know whether he has used my money for his own purposes or not."

"If you ask me, I think he has," said Mr. Musselboro.

"Then I'll go into it, and I'll find it out, and if it is so, as sure as my name's Van Siever, I'll sew him up." Having uttered which terrible threat, the old woman drew a chair to the table and seated herself fairly down, as though she were determined to go through all the books of the office before she quitted that room. Mrs. Van Siever in her present habiliments was not a thing so terrible to look at as she had been in her wiggeries at Mrs. Dobbs Broughton's dinner-table. Her curls were laid aside altogether, and she wore simply a front beneath her close bonnet,—and a very old front, too, which was not loudly offensive because it told no lies. Her eyes were as bright, and

her little wizen face was as sharp, as ever; but the wizen face and the bright eyes were not so much amiss as seen together with the old dark brown silk dress which she now wore, as they had been with the wiggeries and the evening finery. Even now, in her morning costume, in her work-a-day business dress, as we may call it, she looked to be very old,—so old that nobody could guess her age. People attempting to guess would say that she must be at least over eighty. And yet she was wiry, and strong, and nimble. It was not because she was feeble that she was thought to be so old. They who so judged of her were led to their opinion by the extreme thinness of her face, and by the brightness of her eyes, joined to the depth of the hollows in which they lay, and the red margin by which they were surrounded. It was not really the fact that Mrs. Van Siever was so very aged, for she had still some years to live before she would reach eighty, but that she was such a weird old woman, so small, so ghastly, and so ugly! "I'll sew him up, if he's been robbing me," she said. "I will, indeed." And she stretched out her hand to grab at the ledger which Musselboro had been using.

"You won't understand anything from that," said he, pushing the book over to her.

"You can explain it to me."

"That's all straight sailing, that is."

"And where does he keep the figures that ain't straight sailing? That's the book I want to see."

"There is no such book."

"Look here, Gus,—if I find you deceiving me I'll throw you overboard as sure as I'm a living woman. I will indeed. I'll have no mercy. I've stuck to you, and made a man of you, and I expect you to stick to me."

"Not much of a man," said Musselboro, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

"You've never had a shilling yet but what I gave you."

"Yes; I have. I've had what I've worked for,—and worked confounded hard too."

"Look here, Musselboro; if you're going to throw me over, just tell me so, and let us begin fair."

"I'm not going to throw you over. I've always been on the square with you. Why don't you trust me out and out, and then I could do a deal better for you. You ask me now about your money. I don't know about your money, Mrs. Van Siever. How am I to know anything about your money, Mrs. Van Siever? You don't give me any power of keeping a hand upon Dobbs Broughton. I suppose you have security

from Dobbs Broughton, but I don't know what security you have, Mrs. Van Siever. He owes you now 915*l.* 16*s.* 2*d.* on last year's account!"

"Why doesn't he give me a cheque for the money?"

"He says he can't spare it. You may have 500*l.*, and the rest when he can give it you. Or he'll give you his note-of-hand at fourteen days for the whole."

"Bother his note-of-hand. Why should I take his note-of-hand?"

"Do as you like, Mrs. Van Siever."

"It's the interest on my own money. Why don't he give it me? I suppose he has had it."

"You must ask him that, Mrs. Van Siever. You're in partnership with him, and he can tell you. Nobody else knows anything about it. If you were in partnership with me, then of course I could tell you. But you're not. You've never trusted me, Mrs. Van Siever."

The lady remained there closeted with Mr. Musselboro for an hour after that, and did, I think, at length learn something more as to the details of her partner's business, than her faithful servant Mr. Musselboro had at first found himself able to give to her. And at last they came to friendly and confidential terms, in the midst of which the personal welfare of Mr. Dobbs Broughton was, I fear, somewhat forgotten. Not that Mr. Musselboro palpably and plainly threw his friend overboard. He took his friend's part,—alleging excuses for him, and pleading some facts. "Of course, you know, a man like that is fond of pleasure, Mrs. Van Siever. He's been at it more or less all his life. I don't suppose he ever missed a Derby or an Oaks, or the cup at Ascot, or the Goodwood in his life." "He'll have to miss them before long, I'm thinking," said Mrs. Van Siever. "And as to not cashing up, you must remember, Mrs. Van Siever, that ten per cent. won't come in quite as regularly as four or five. When you go for high interest, there must be hitches here and there. There must, indeed, Mrs. Van Siever." "I know all about it," said Mrs. Van Siever. "If he gave it me as soon as he got it himself, I shouldn't complain. Never mind. He's only got to give me my little bit of money out of the business, and then he and I will be all square. You come and see Clara this evening, Gus."

Then Mr. Musselboro put Mrs. Van Siever into another cab, and went out upon 'Change,—hanging about the Bank, and standing in Threadneedle Street, talking to other men just like himself. When he saw Dobbs Broughton he told that gentleman that Mrs. Van Siever had been in her tantrums, but that he had managed to pacify her before she left Hook Court. "I'm to take her the cheque for the five hundred to-night," he said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JAEL.

On the first of March, Conway Dalrymple's easel was put up in Mrs. Dobbs Broughton's boudoir upstairs, the canvas was placed upon it on which the outlines of Jael and Sisera had been already drawn, and Mrs. Broughton and Clara Van Siever and Conway Dalrymple were assembled with the view of steady art-work. But before we see how they began their work together, we will go back for a moment to John Eames on his return to his London lodgings. The first thing every man does when he returns home after an absence, is to look at his letters, and John Eames looked at his. There were not very many. There was a note marked immediate, from Sir Raffle Buffle, in which Sir R. had scrawled in four lines a notification that he should be driven to an extremity of inconvenience if Eames were not at his post at half-past nine on the following morning. "I think I see myself there at that hour," said John. There was a notification of a house dinner, which he was asked to join, at his club, and a card for an evening gathering at Lady Glencora Palliser's,—procured for him by his friend Conway,—and an invitation to dinner at the house of his uncle, Mr. Toogood; and there was a scented note in the handwriting of a lady, which he did not recognize. "My nearest and dearest friend, M. D. M.," he said, as he opened the note and looked at the signature. Then he read the letter from Miss Demolines.

"My dear Mr. Eames,

"Pray come to me at once. I know that you are to be back to-morrow. Do not lose an hour if you can help it. I shall be at home at half-past five. I fear what you know of has been begun. But it certainly shall not go on. In one way or another it must be prevented. I won't say another word till I see you, but pray come at once.

"Yours always,

"*Thursday.*" "M. D. M."

"Poor mamma isn't very well, so you had better ask for me."

"Beautiful!" said Johnny, as he read the note. "There's nothing

I like so much as a mystery,—especially if it's about nothing. I wonder why she is so desperately anxious that the picture should not be painted. I'd ask Dalrymple, only I should spoil the mystery." Then he sat himself down, and began to think of Lily. There could be no treason to Lily in his amusing himself with the freaks of such a woman as Miss Demolines.

At eleven o'clock on the morning of the 1st of March,—the day following that on which Miss Demolines had written her note,—the easel was put up and the canvas was placed on it in Mrs. Broughton's room. Mrs. Broughton and Clara were both there, and when they had seen the outlines as far as it had been drawn, they proceeded to make arrangements for their future operations. The period of work was to begin always at eleven, and was to be continued for an hour and a half or for two hours on the days on which they met. I fear that there was a little improper scheming in this against the two persons whom the ladies were bound to obey. Mr. Dobbs Broughton invariably left his house soon after ten in the morning. It would sometimes happen, though not frequently, that he returned home early in the day,—at four perhaps, or even before that; and should he chance to do so while the picture was going on, he would catch them at their work if the work were postponed till after luncheon. And then again, Mrs. Van Siever would often go out in the morning, and when she did so, would always go without her daughter. On such occasions she went into the city, or to other resorts of business, at which, in some manner quite unintelligible to her daughter, she looked after her money. But when she did not go out in the morning, she did go out in the afternoon, and she would then require her daughter's company. There was some place to which she always went of a Friday morning, and at which she stayed for two or three hours. Friday therefore was a fitting day on which to begin the work at Mrs. Broughton's house. All this was explained between the three conspirators. Mrs. Dobbs Broughton declared that if she entertained the slightest idea that her husband would object to the painting of the picture in her room, nothing on earth would induce her to lend her countenance to it; but yet it might be well not to tell him just at first, perhaps not till the sittings were over,—perhaps not till the picture was finished; as, otherwise, tidings of the picture might get round to ears which were not intended to hear it. "Poor dear Dobbs is so careless with a secret." Miss Van Siever explained her motives in a very different way. "I know mamma would not let me do it if she knew it; and therefore I shall not tell her." "My dear Clara," said Mrs. Broughton with a

smile, "you are so outspoken!" "And why not?" said Miss Van Siever. "I am old enough to judge for myself. If mamma does not want to be deceived, she ought not to treat me like a child. Of course she'll find it out sooner or later; but I don't care about that." Conway Dalrymple said nothing as the two ladies were thus excusing themselves. "How delightful it must be not to have a master," said Mrs. Broughton, addressing him. "But then a man has to work for his own bread," said he. "I suppose it comes about equal in the long run."

Very little drawing or painting was done on that day. In the first place it was necessary that the question of costume should be settled, and both Mrs. Broughton and the artist had much to say on the subject. It was considered proper that Jael should be dressed as a Jewess, and there came to be much question how Jewesses dressed themselves in those very early days. Mrs. Broughton had prepared her jewels and raiment of many colours, but the painter declared that the wife of Heber the Kenite would have no jewels. But when Mrs. Broughton discovered from her Bible that Heber had been connected by family ties with Moses, she was more than ever sure that Heber's wife would have in her tent much of the spoilings of the Egyptians. And when Clara Van Siever suggested that at any rate she would not have worn them in a time of confusion when soldiers were loose, flying about the country, Mrs. Broughton was quite confident that she would have put them on before she invited the captain of the enemy's host into her tent. The artist at last took the matter into his own hand by declaring that Miss Van Siever would sit the subject much better without jewels, and therefore all Mrs. Broughton's gewgaws were put back into their boxes. And then on four different times the two ladies had to retire into Mrs. Broughton's room in order that Jael might be arrayed in various costumes,—and in each costume she had to kneel down, taking the hammer in her hand, and holding the pointed stick which had been prepared to do duty as the nail, upon the forehead of a dummy Sisera. At last it was decided that her raiment should be altogether white, and that she should wear, twisted round her head and falling over her shoulder, a Roman silk scarf of various colours. "Where Jael could have gotten it I don't know," said Clara. "You may be sure that there were lots of such things among the Egyptians," said Mrs. Broughton, "and that Moses brought away all the best for his own family."

"And who is to be Sisera?" asked Mrs. Broughton in one of the pauses in their work.

"I'm thinking of asking my friend John Eames to sit."

"Of course we cannot sit together," said Miss Van Siever.

"There's no reason why you should," said Dalrymple. "I can do the second figure in my own room." Then there was a bargain made that Sisera should not be a portrait. "It would never do," said Mrs. Broughton, shaking her head very gravely.

Though there was really very little done to the picture on that day, the work was commenced; and Mrs. Broughton, who had at first objected strongly to the idea, and who had said twenty times that it was quite out of the question that it should be done in her house, became very eager in her delight about it. Nobody should know anything of the picture till it should be exhibited. That would be best. And it should be the picture of the year! She was a little heart-broken when Dalrymple assured her that it could not possibly be finished for exhibition in that May; but she came to again when he declared that he meant to put out all his strength upon it. "There will be five or six months' work in it," he said. "Will there, indeed? And how much work was there in 'The Graces?'" "The Graces," as will perhaps be remembered, was the triple portrait of Mrs. Dobbs Broughton herself. This question the artist did not answer with absolute accuracy, but contented himself with declaring that with such a model as Mrs. Broughton the picture had been comparatively easy.

Mrs. Broughton, having no doubt that ultimate object of which she had spoken to her friend Conway steadily in view, took occasion before the sitting was over to leave the room, so that the artist might have an opportunity of speaking a word in private to his model,—if he had any such word to speak. And Mrs. Broughton, as she did this, felt that she was doing her duty as a wife, a friend, and a Christian. She was doing her duty as a wife, because she was giving the clearest proof in the world,—the clearest at any rate to herself,—that the intimacy between herself and her friend Conway had in it nothing that was improper. And she was doing her duty as a friend, because Clara Van Siever, with her large expectations, would be an eligible wife. And she was doing her duty as a Christian, because the whole thing was intended to be moral. Miss Demolines had declared that her friend Maria Clutterbuck,—as Miss Demolines delighted to call Mrs. Broughton, in memory of dear old innocent days,—had high principles; and the reader will see that she was justified in her declaration. "It will be better so," said Mrs. Broughton, as she sat upon her bed and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. "Yes; it will be better so. There is a pang. Of course there's a pang. But it will be better so." Acting upon this high principle, she allowed Conway Dalrymple five minutes to say what he had to say to Clara Van Siever. Then she allowed herself to

indulge in some very savage feelings in reference to her husband,—accusing her husband in her thoughts of great cruelty,—nay, of brutality, because of certain sharp words that he had said as to Conway Dalrymple. "But of course he can't understand," said Mrs. Broughton to herself. "How is it to be expected that he should understand?"

But she allowed her friend on this occasion only five minutes, thinking probably that so much time might suffice. A woman, when she is jealous, is apt to attribute to the other woman with whom her jealousy is concerned, both weakness and timidity, and to the man both audacity and strength. A woman who has herself taken perhaps twelve months in the winning, will think that another woman is to be won in five minutes. It is not to be supposed that Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had ever been won by any one except by Mr. Dobbs Broughton. At least, let it not be supposed that she had ever acknowledged a spark of love for Conway Dalrymple. But nevertheless there was enough of jealousy in her present mood to make her think poorly of Miss Van Siever's capacity for standing a siege against the artist's eloquence. Otherwise, having left the two together with the object which she had acknowledged to herself, she would hardly have returned to them after so very short an interval.

"I hope you won't dislike the trouble of all this?" said Dalrymple to his model, as soon as Mrs. Broughton was gone.

"I cannot say that I like it very much," said Miss Van Siever.

"I'm afraid it will be a bore;—but I hope you'll go through with it."

"I shall if I am not prevented," said Miss Van Siever. "When I've said that I'll do a thing, I like to do it."

There was a pause in the conversation which took up a considerable portion of the five minutes. Miss Van Siever was not holding her nail during these moments, but was sitting in a commonplace way on her chair, while Dalrymple was scraping his palette. "I wonder what it was that first induced you to sit?" said he.

"Oh, I don't know. I took a fancy for it."

"I'm very glad you did take the fancy. You'll make an excellent model. If you won't mind posing again for a few minutes—I will not weary you to-day. Your right arm a little more forward."

"But I should tumble down."

"Not if you lean well on to the nail."

"But that would have woken Sisera before she had struck a blow."

"Never mind that. Let us try it." Then Mrs. Broughton returned, with that pleasant feeling in her bosom of having done her

duty as a wife, a friend, and a Christian. "Mrs. Broughton," continued the painter, "just steady Miss Van Siever's shoulder with your hand; and now bring the arm and the elbow a little more forward."

"But Jael did not have a friend to help her in that way," said Miss Van Siever.

At the end of an hour and a half the two ladies retired, and Jael disrobed herself, and Miss Van Siever put on her customary raiment. It was agreed among them that they had commenced their work auspiciously, and that they would meet again on the following Monday. The artist begged to be allowed an hour to go on with his work in Mrs. Broughton's room, and the hour was conceded to him. It was understood that he could not take the canvas backwards and forwards with him to his own house, and he pointed out that no progress whatever could be made, unless he were occasionally allowed some such grace as this. Mrs. Broughton doubted and hesitated, made difficulties, and lifted up her hands in despair. "It is easy for you to say, Why not? but I know very well why not." But at last she gave way. "Honi soit qui mal y pense," she said; "that must be my protection." So she followed Miss Van Siever downstairs, leaving Mr. Dalrymple in possession of her boudoir. "I shall give you just one hour," she said, "and then I shall come and turn you out." So she went down, and, as Miss Van Siever would not stay to lunch with her, she ate her lunch by herself, sending a glass of sherry and a biscuit up to the poor painter at his work.

Exactly at the end of the hour she returned to him. "Now, Conway, you must go," she said.

"But why in such a hurry?"

"Because I say that it must be so. When I say so, pray let that be sufficient." But still Dalrymple went on working. "Conway," she said, "how can you treat me with so much disdain?"

"Disdain, Mrs. Broughton!"

"Yes, disdain. Have I not begged you to understand that I cannot allow you to remain here, and yet you pay no attention to my wishes."

"I have done now;" and he began to put his brushes and paints together. "I suppose all these things may remain here?"

"Yes; they may remain. They must do so, of course. There; if you will put the easel in the corner, with the canvas behind it, they will not be seen if he should chance to come into the room."

"He would not be angry, I suppose, if he saw them?"

"There is no knowing. Men are so unreasonable. All men are, I think. All those are whom I have had the fortune to know. Women

generally say that men are selfish. I do not complain so much that they are selfish as that they are thoughtless. They are headstrong and do not look forward to results. Now you,—I do not think you would willingly do me an injury?"

"I do not think I would."

"I am sure you would not;—but yet you would forget to save me from one."

"What injury?"

"Oh, never mind. I am not thinking of anything in particular. From myself, for instance. But we will not talk about that. That way madness lies. Tell me, Conway;—what do you think of Clara Van Siever?"

"She is very handsome, certainly."

"And clever?"

"Decidedly clever. I should think she has a temper of her own."

"What woman is there worth a straw that has not? If Clara Van Siever were ill-used, she would resent it. I do not doubt that for a moment. I should not like to be the man who would do it."

"Nor I, either," said Conway.

"But there is plenty of feminine softness in that character, if she were treated with love and kindness. Conway, if you will take my advice you will ask Clara Van Siever to be your wife. But perhaps you have already."

"Who; I?"

"Yes; you."

"I have not done it yet, certainly, Mrs. Broughton."

"And why should you not do it?"

"There are two or three reasons;—but perhaps none of any great importance. Do you know of none, Mrs. Broughton?"

"I know of none," said Mrs. Broughton in a very serious,—in almost a tragic tone;—"of none that should weigh for a moment. As far as I am concerned, nothing would give me more pleasure."

"That is so kind of you!"

"I mean to be kind. I do, indeed, Conway. I know it will be better for you that you should be settled,—very much better. And it will be better for me. I do not mind admitting that;—though in saying so I trust greatly to your generosity to interpret my words properly."

"I shall not flatter myself, if you mean that."

"There is no question of flattery, Conway. The question is simply of truth and prudence. Do you not know that it would be better that you should be married?"

"Not unless a certain gentleman were to die first," said Conway Dalrymple, as he deposited the last of his painting paraphernalia in the recess which had been prepared for them by Mrs. Broughton.

"Conway, how can you speak in that wicked, wicked way!"

"I can assure you I do not wish the gentleman in question the slightest harm in the world. If his welfare depended on me, he should be as safe as the Bank of England."

"And you will not take my advice?"

"What advice?"

"About Clara?"

"Mrs. Broughton, matrimony is a very important thing."

"Indeed, it is;—oh, who can say how important! There was a time, Conway, when I thought you had given your heart to Madalina Demolines."

"Heaven forbid!"

"And I grieved, because I thought that she was not worthy of you."

"There was never anything in that, Mrs. Broughton."

"She thought that there was. At any rate, she said so. I know that for certain. She told me so herself. But let that pass. Clara Van Siever is in every respect very different from Madalina. Clara, I think, is worthy of you. And Conway,—of course it is not for me to dictate to you; but this I must tell you——" Then she paused, as though she did not know how to finish her sentence.

"What must you tell me?"

"I will tell you nothing more. If you cannot understand what I have said, you must be more dull of comprehension than I believe you to be. Now go. Why are you not gone this half-hour?"

"How could I go while you were giving me all this good advice?"

"I have not asked you to stay. Go now, at any rate. And, remember, Conway, if this picture is to go on, I will not have you remaining here after the work is done. Will you remember that?" And she held him by the hand while he declared that he would remember it.

Mrs. Dobbs Broughton was no more in love with Conway Dalrymple than she was in love with King Charles on horseback at Charing Cross. And, over and beyond the protection which came to her in the course of nature from unimpassioned feelings in this special phase of her life,—and indeed, I may say, in every phase of her life,—it must be acknowledged on her behalf that she did enjoy that protection which comes from what we call principle,—though the principle

was not perhaps very high of its kind. Madalina Demolines had been right when she talked of her friend Maria's principles. Dobbs Broughton had been so far lucky in that jump in the dark which he had made in taking a wife to himself, that he had not fallen upon a really vicious woman, or upon a woman of strong feeling. If it had come to be the lot of Mrs. Dobbs Broughton to have six hours' work to do every day of her life, I think that the work would have been done badly, but that it would have kept her free from all danger. As it was she had nothing to do. She had no child. She was not given to much reading. She could not sit with a needle in her hand all day. She had no aptitude for May meetings, or the excitement of charitable good works. Life with her was very dull, and she found no amusement within her reach so easy and so pleasant as the amusement of pretending to be in love. If all that she did and all that she said could only have been taken for its worth and for nothing more, by the different persons concerned, there was very little in it to flatter Mr. Dalrymple or to give cause for tribulation to Mr. Broughton. She probably cared but little for either of them. She was one of those women to whom it is not given by nature to care very much for anybody. But, of the two, she certainly cared the most for Mr. Dobbs Broughton,—because Mr. Dobbs Broughton belonged to her. As to leaving Mr. Dobbs Broughton's house, and putting herself into the hands of another man,—no Imogen of a wife was ever less likely to take a step so wicked, so dangerous, and so generally disagreeable to all the parties concerned.

But Conway Dalrymple,—though now and again he had got a side glance at her true character with clear-seeing eyes,—did allow himself to be flattered and deceived. He knew that she was foolish and ignorant, and that she often talked wonderful nonsense. He knew also that she was continually contradicting herself,—as when she would strenuously beg him to leave her, while she would continue to talk to him in a strain that prevented the possibility of his going. But, nevertheless, he was flattered, and he did believe that she loved him. As to his love for her,—he knew very well that it amounted to nothing. Now and again, perhaps twice a week, if he saw her as often, he would say something which would imply a declaration of affection. He felt that as much as that was expected from him, and that he ought not to hope to get off cheaper. And now that this little play was going on about Miss Van Siever, he did think that Mrs. Dobbs Broughton was doing her very best to overcome an unfortunate attachment. It is so gratifying to a young man's feelings to suppose that another man's wife has conceived

an unfortunate attachment for him! Conway Dalrymple ought not to have been fooled by such a woman; but I fear that he was fooled by her.

As he returned home to-day from Mrs. Broughton's house to his own lodgings he rambled out for a while into Kensington Gardens, and thought of his position seriously. "I don't see why I should not marry her," he said to himself, thinking of course of Miss Van Siever. "If Maria is not in earnest it is not my fault. And it would be my wish that she should be in earnest. If I suppose her to be so, and take her at her word, she can have no right to quarrel with me. Poor Maria! at any rate it will be better for her, for no good can come of this kind of thing. And, by heavens, with a woman like that, of strong feelings, one never knows what may happen." And then he thought of the condition he would be in, if he were to find her some fine day in his own rooms, and if she were to tell him that she could not go home again, and that she meant to remain with him!

In the meantime Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had gone down into her own drawing-room, had tucked herself up on the sofa, and had fallen fast asleep.

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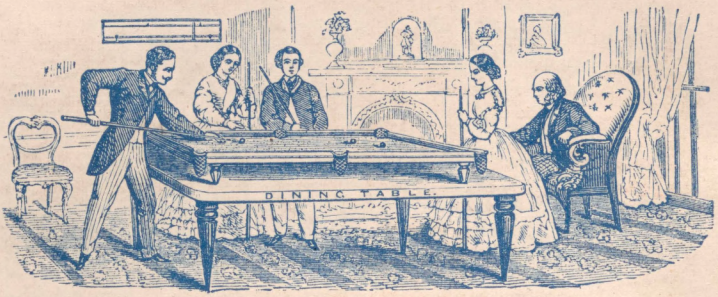

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